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AUTHOR Schwertfeger, Jane
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ABSTRACT

With particular attention given to children under 6 years of age, this discussion identifies issues related to the effects on children of divorce, father absence, and student/teacher interaction. Research relating to these issues is reviewed, and recommendations for teachers are offered. Issues concerning divorce, the duration of separation, the child's age and developmental stage, and the presence or absence of family support systems are considered. Focusing on studies of infants and very young children, the discussion of father absence reports findings about positive contributions fathers make to families, the effect of father absence on children's cognitive development and school achievement, effects of fathers on sex-role development and positive heterosexual adjustment, and teachers' attitudes toward and expectations of children of divorce. Recommendations for teachers of young children focus on developmental considerations, teacher role and appropriate modifications of the curriculum, observations of children's play behavior to better understand and aid the child, and the problem of stereotyped negative expectations about the child of divorced parents. (RH)

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Research Concerning Young Children
of Divorced Parents and
Recommendations for Teachers

Jane Schwertfeger, professor
The School of Education
The University of Michigan
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Research Concerning Young Children of Divorced Parents
and Recommendations for Teachers

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Research Concerning Children of Divorced Parents
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Major changes are taking place in the size, makeup and definition of the family and as has happened in other transition periods, the schools are being asked to respond. The divorce rate has nearly doubled in the last decade, families maintained by a single parent have increased by fifty percent during the same period and more young adults are delaying marriage while establishing family-like relationships (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1980). The national Center for the Study of Divorce predicts that if current trends continue over half of the American population will be touched by divorce by the turn of the century. This is a problem for the schools. In some kindergartens and first grades forty to fifty percent of the children are from divorced homes (Wilkerson and Beck, 1977). Schools are in a position to help with these changes because other than the home they are the most continuing institution in the lives of children. Statistics on divorcing families show that on the average divorce occurs within the first eight years of marriage; this means that it often affects very young children (~~Note~~). But, older children also feel the effects. In 1982 Lawrence Cremen (Note 2) stated that such changes in the family are part of a series of events causing children now entering school to differ from their predecessors in behaviors, attitudes and values. Those who work with children in school should know how these changes affect their own behavior and the children they teach.

Studies have examined the effects on children of the separation of the parents, the absence of the father, and the child's interactions with teachers. This paper will identify the chief issues and review the studies relating to these issues, particularly those that offer help in understanding

children under six years of age. References to the school will include educational and group care for infants, toddlers and preschoolers. This review of research covers the first section of the paper; the second section will point out implications of these findings for teachers and others who work with young children.

The Issues

Changes within a family occur for many reasons: death of a family member, separation for personal or economic reasons and an increasing cause is divorce. Divorce often causes immediate change in family makeup and structure such as formation of a household with a single parent, often a mother. There are serious questions about the direct and indirect effects on the children from these changes. For example, these crises often are cited as the cause of negative behaviors and cognitive changes with accompanying behavior problems. The divorce or death may be the precipitating cause which sets up a series of circumstances each of which in turn affects the child. For this reason the relationships of cause and effect in disrupted family situations are complex, easy to misjudge and difficult to study. The effects on a child most probably are related to a series rather than one isolated event. For example, divorce often sets up changes in the number and makeup of family members, in living style and conditions, in the major caretaker and often in economic security of the family. All of these are related to past and future parent relationships, to the number and quality of support systems available to the new family unit, to the strengths and personal characteristics of the child himself and to continued contacts with both parents after separation. For these reasons it is difficult to identify the causes as positive or negative and identify cause and effect. While this may not be necessary it suggests

that for a period of time the child may be more vulnerable to behavior change and personal risk. And, there may be certain behaviors or development which show up at a later time in the child's life.

In spite of such concerns there increasingly are studies with carefully carried out design and common findings. The studies cited in this paper point to these and indicate how certain research data and understandings fit together and recommend teacher behaviors.

Divorce, a major reason for the formation of a single parent family, and often accompanied with crisis implications for the child and his caretakers, will be considered first. Review of studies of the effects when father absence accompanies divorce and a discussion of implications for teachers will follow.

REVIEW OF THE RESEARCH

DIVORCE

As with other things which happen to children a single event such as the divorce must be considered in context with related variables such as the child's sex, timing of the separation of the parents, and the support systems available to this child and his/her parents. These have implications for the child as well as for those who care for him.

Because the negatives of divorce may be lessened due to incidence and changing social values, the reader is cautioned to consider this material in terms of changing social/cultural norms and practices. As more families experience divorce and it no longer makes a child different from his peers, the impact on children may be different.

The Issue of Time

There are reasons for considering time as it relates to these children. The studies of divorce and children have implications because of two issues

related to time: (1) the importance of the period of time spanning the parents' separation and (2) the child's chronological age and stage of development when the separation of the parents occurs. These will be considered.

The time space surrounding the event of the separation of the parents has these implications. Hetherington (Note 3) documents the severe stress and disorganization which may be experienced by families in the first year following the event of separation and divorce. There may be a cycle of negative mother-son interactions which trigger increased negative behaviors in the child and incompetent parenting skills. After two years the mother-child relationship often still is a problem, but the serious stress has lessened. This also may be the time when "acting out" behaviors and increased aggression in school increases.

When the functioning of mothers and fathers changes following divorce, data indicate that when a father leaves the home following divorce the family system often is more disorganized (Hetherington Note 3). This disorganized family behavior appears to peak at one year and return to previous patterns two years following the event. Stress in the children is reflected in changes in parent-child relationships, family life style, personal, emotional distress and self attitudes. These changes may be mediating factors in changed child behavior and in turn set up negative interactions between parents and children.

One reason for immediate changes in child behavior is the increased disorganization within a family. On a scale viewing the households of intact and divorced parents during the first year following the divorce, separated households were more disorganized than family intact ones. Mothers and children more often ate at separate times, bedtimes were more erratic and the children more likely to arrive late at school (Hetherington, Cox & Cox, Note 3).

The greatest changes take place in the first year following the separation whereas a process of more organized behavior and even healing takes place by the end of the second year. (Hetherington, Cox & Cox, Note 3). Of those families able to adapt to stress and changes during the period following separation the parent/child rearing practices improved. Studies do not attend to whether this improvement continues or becomes stable (Hetherington, Note 3).

Other events occurring near the separation often are cited as important. Six months to a year before, and a year afterwards the family may experience increased emotional, logistical and even physical turmoil according to Bane (1979). Moving to a new neighborhood, financial instability or solving child care for the working parent takes its toll on even the most responsible parent and on his/her child. Schools report this is the time when they most note stressful behaviors in the child (Bane, 1979).

Disruptive behaviors, insecurity, guilt, isolation and a feeling of being different than peers are symptoms to which teachers must respond. When relationships between the parents are overly negative, personal and emotional adjustment for children and parents tend to deteriorate. In this period family members may test a variety of coping mechanisms to deal with new stress. Parents seek outside social relationships and children avoid contacts with other children whose homes are more stable.

Studies documenting such stress most often are of children a bit older than the focus of this paper, but similar reactions, possibly expressed in a different way may be true for preschoolers. Play is the main activity of younger children and the play behavior of a stressful child may change. A study of preschool children's play indicates that the impact of divorce extends beyond the family behaviors into play and social relations in schools. These children were more aggressive and less imaginative in play. The

adjustment was considered to be more difficult for boys than for girls, and changes in play were expressed near the period of family separation (Cox & Cox, 1979).

A second implication of time relates to the age of the child and his development when the separation of the parents takes place. There is evidence that very young children especially respond negatively to divorce. The early years, infancy and preschool, are considered by many researchers critical for negatives to later development from the divorce of the parents. (Biller, 1969; Hetherington, Note 3; Radin, 1976; Santrock, 1970; Green, 1974; Kelly, Wallerstein, 1979; Cox & Cox, 1979). It particularly is true when accompanied by father absence resulting in increased negative effects upon later school achievement and sex identity development. One explanation for these negatives to young children may be that the very young child is dependent upon his parents in all ways for providing his safety and security. As he grows older he gains other supports and satisfactions in school and has greater ability to seek solace from friends, neighbors, teachers and satisfying intellectual and social pursuits. Parents typically are the young child's primary model, keeper, protector and companion. The child before five years is almost wholly dependent on the family members; therefore responds to their stress and absence. Accompanying the implications of divorce are another group of research data suggesting negative effects resulting from the absence of the father.

Family Support Systems

The effects of divorce should be viewed in terms of the accompanying family support systems. The family with adequate finances, positive emotional support from relatives, neighbors or friends, and the child with a responsible parent and positive child-parent relationships is advantaged during the period of reconstruction following family change.

Parents and indirectly the child generally benefit from such personal supports. Grandparents, siblings, and close peers or a competent live-in housekeeper or friend all may help a parent be more effective. However, none of these supports are as helpful to the child as a continued, positive, mutually supportive relationship of the separated couple and continued involvement of the father with the child (Hetherington, Cox & Cox, Note 3).

In addition to the healing effects of time as the family reorganizes, positive changes in the parents themselves, particularly in the major caregiver, may encourage positive changes in the child's behavior (Hetherington, Cox & Cox, Note 3). Others discuss the implications which financial supports play. When a family must move to a less desirable neighborhood, economize on earlier taken for granted comforts and face new costs, such as child care, the pressures on the parent may affect the child negatively. Many mothers go to work full time for the first time following divorce and therefore are less available for support to the child in a time of need (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1975). The employment of the mother does not clearly have negative implications on the child in research studies, but when new employment coincides with other family changes it may have negative implications for children.

FATHER ABSENCE

A separate group of studies considers the current and future effect of the father's absence upon the child. The literature considers these in terms of impact on personality development and of cognitive effects on later learning. Both areas are important when the child's behavior in school is considered. The following discussion will focus upon studies of infants and very young children who experience the absence of the father early in their development. This age distinction limits the number of

studies available, but speaks to the importance of considering this age group.

Fathers and Infants

The studies of family relationships point to the importance of continued mother/father/infant interactions and suggest negatives when opportunities for such contacts are changes.

The presence of the father to the mother in the family is noteworthy. Whether this relationship is positive or negative it appears to be very important to the child. Many suggest that the father affects the infant by altering the interaction patterns of the mother and child (Parke, 1979 and Pederson, Note 4). This comes about through the quality of physical as well as emotional support the father provides the mother, and the quality of economic stability he gives to the family. This especially is true when considered in relation to the amount of time the mother spends with the child and the quality of the mothering (Parke, 1979). The consideration that the father may free the mother of routine care has been considered important (Parke, 1979). If the father's attitudes toward the mother are positive the effects upon the infant may be also. "A good baby and a good marriage go together" is an old proverb. If his behavior is positive the father's presence appears to modify the nature of the mother-child interaction and may influence the child by affecting other family members such as other children, relatives and guests. The mother's needs for positive supports from others when the father leaves the home as in divorce and for increased opportunities for his involvement with the child is evident in both clinical and research literature.

The family is a social system and the necessity of paternal involvement and nurturance to the child is associated with cognitive competence (Clarke-Stewart, 1973; Radin, 1976). Radin (1976) states that the family

interactions are more important for boys and most damaging when such nurturance and parent/child involvement are absent in the very early years. The lack of both parents also may influence daughters as a result of changes in the mother-daughter relationship when the family status changes.

Clarke-Stewart (1977, suggests that intellectual competence of a child is affected by both fathers and mothers, illustrating the complex fashion in which all three influence each other in the course of an infant's development. She stresses that fathers play a very influential role in the infant's cognitive development. She states: "When the father is absent these necessary mother/father/child interactions change."

Cognitive Development and School Achievement

The age of the child when the father leaves the home appears important when intellectual functioning and cognitive development are considered. It appears to be especially significant for children under five years of age.

Santrock (1975) explored the time of absence of the father due to divorce, death or separation and impact upon cognitive functioning of the child. A major conclusion was that the age of the child at separation was significant in the impact on the child's current and future intellectual functions. In general, the time of absence affected boys most. When the father was absent before five years of age it was more damaging than when it occurred later. The period between birth and two years of age was cited as a particularly vulnerable time. In mathematics learning, often cited as especially sensitive to emotional anxiety later math achievement appears most affected in children who were less than five years of age when father absence occurred. Sutton-Smith and colleagues (1968) point to ages one through nine years as a most vulnerable period for influencing math understandings in girls. When there are less than positive

family interactions during this period later achievement may be affected.

The cumulative effect of cognitive damage and later cognitive effects following early abandonment is mentioned by Santrock (1970) and Wohlford and Lieberman (1970). When absence of the father due to divorce, separation or desertion occurs before five years it also is mentioned as damaging to learning by Radin (1976), and Lamb (1976). Little explanation is made whether this is due to the loss of child-father contacts or to the stress upon the single parent who finds himself/herself as major caretaker of a very young child. A related suggestion is made that father absence in the early years more often is associated with maternal over-protection than when the absence occurs later. This maternal behavior may cause preference and school success in female preferred areas while causing failure in more male oriented ones. The avoidance of math by girls may be an example of this.

There are studies which examine father absence in relation to school achievement. In a study examining the effects of family organization upon student achievement Smidchens and Thompson (Note 5) observe that students from two-parent families tend to record higher school achievement scores than students from one-parent families. The family disorganization associated with these families appeared to have a greater impact on students in the lower range of the socioeconomic scales.

The issue of father absence so prevalent among black families is a concern of three studies of the effect of father absence upon the academic achievement of black children. Sciara (Note 6) considered reading and math scores and reports that in a summary of three studies statistical differences favored the children from father present homes as more successful in school.

In spite of the suggestion and even research documentation suggesting father's absence may have a detrimental effect on the child's cognitive development, there are recent studies pointing out that methodological problems, contradictory findings and competing interpretations of available data introduce uncertainty concerning the exact nature and extent of the effects. Shinn, (1978) reviewing well controlled studies found no affects and points to even a few beneficial effects. Considering the effects of absence on a large sample of father present and father absent children, Svanum and Bungle (1982) conclude that father absence when used as an index variable which is assumed to represent underlying psychological and familial process it is inconsistently and often weakly related to cognitive development. Also, that differences can often be accounted for by socio-economic status. Most of the data used in reported studies was collected during the 1960's and early 1970's and since that time substantial societal changes have occurred regarding one parent families. The fact that they are more common and more accepted diminishes the chance of negative expectations in the 1980's.

Considering that understanding of parental influences on cognitive development in all children are uncertain there still is support that the father particularly influences his son's intellectual development and facilitates cognitive development from infancy on (Lederer, 1964; Biller, 1974). And, his presence in the home has positive implications for the school preferences and achievement of the children who live there. In the past effects of risk and divorce have been viewed in terms of personal social growth; this newer look at the relationships of family organization to school achievement holds promise for understandings in the future.

Personal/Social Influences

Presence of a father in the home appears to be related to appropriate

sex role development and positive heterosexual adjustment of all boys and girls. Children raised without fathers seem to be at risk in these areas. Boys raised without fathers are reported to be less masculine in sex role preferences and also in their behavior (Biller, 1974; Santrock, Note 7).

Difficulties interacting with males in adolescence and later difficulties in male-female relationships for girls earlier absented by fathers is suggested. Hetherington, (1972) observes that girls whose fathers are absent due to divorce or death may have difficulty interacting comfortably with men and male peers in adolescence. These girls had the most difficulties when the father was not in the home before five years of age (Hetherington, Note 3). Others also point to later difficulties in male-female relationships. When fathers are absent early in their lives, women often complain later of difficulties achieving satisfactory relations with their husbands, and girls whose fathers are not present early in their lives later may have difficulty interacting with male peers (Jacobson-Ryder, 1969). The lack of opportunity for meaningful masculine and feminine contacts early in childhood may make it difficult for females to develop interpersonal skills adequate for later heterosexual adjustment (Lamb, 1976).

In a study done in Israel with very young subjects, two year olds whose fathers had died and whose entire childhood was in families only with a mother the behavior of boys was observed to be adversely affected at home and in school and it was suggested that the effects were substantially related to the child's sex (Levy-Shiff, 1983). Such a family situation appears highly associated with impaired development for boys and less so for girls. Such children are less controlled and less well socialized to acceptant norms of behavior. This study and others (Hetherington, Cox &

Cox, 1977) explain these effects are due to changes in mothers' general and child rearing behavior and attitudes. The mothers' child rearing attitudes varied as a result of the fathers' absence and their own role as head of the family, causing them to be less controlling in general. The findings concerning diminished control of the child by the mother probably reflect the emotional and practical difficulties that these mothers encounter. This suggests that future studies consider the mothers' role and behavior as head of the family as well as a single event such as the absence of the father. Undoubtedly other logistical and environmental differences in these families also have as yet explained an impact.

Teacher Attitudes and Expectations

Another consideration of ways schools may help children experiencing divorce comes from the studies which suggest that attitudes which teachers bring may influence their own behavior with these children and in turn affect the child. Also, that the attitudes teachers hold may affect the accuracy of research data collected from these children. The child's behaviors may be so influenced by the expectations of their teachers that their true behaviors are masked.

There are two reasons teachers may behave differently to children whose families are divorced: (1) teachers may have negative stereotypes toward these children because of their own disapproval of divorce and (2) they may interact negatively with them because the children themselves actually display behaviors which are aversive and disturbing to the teacher or the stability of the classroom. The first premise is related to the suggestion that the teachers' beliefs and expectations affect the quality of student-teacher interactions, and, that there are sex differences in these. (Lieberman, 1971; Good and Brophy, 1972). This is supported by studies finding that teacher expectations for boys for school achievement are

more negative than teacher expectations for girls (Doma, 1969; Brophy and Good, 1972). Very young children appear especially vulnerable to such stereotypes. Good (1981) reports that younger children, preschool and kindergarteners, are most susceptible to the effects of teachers' beliefs because they more readily accept the authority and autonomy of the teacher role. Finn (1972) suggests that since there are no prior achievements upon which to base expectations for the young child physical characteristics and status labels such as "child of a divorced" family will be important criteria used by teachers for judgement.

There increasingly are studies involving teachers' expectations of children experiencing divorce in their families. Hetherington, Cox and Cox (1979) observed the play of preschool children and social interactions of teachers and children. In interactions with preschoolers, teachers showed more negative behaviors (i.e. negative commands, fewer positive behaviors) toward boys from divorced homes than intact homes. They were more negative to girls from divorced than from intact homes yet less negative than to boys.

Santrock and Tracy (1978) showed videotapes to Education students and described the children as either from homes where parents were divorced or not. These students rated the children from a divorced home significantly more negative in happiness, emotional adjustment and coping with stress. Hammond (1979), studied self concept, achievement and family attitudes of elementary children. Teachers rated boys from divorced homes as more distractable and acting out in these traits. They did not find significant differences between the two groups on reading and math achievement.

DelCampo (1983) showed videotapes of a preschool boy and girl in play and told one group of undergraduate students in a teacher education

program that the children were from divorced homes and another that they were from intact homes. These preservice teachers rated divorced home children more negative than those from intact homes on personality traits and predicted school behaviors. Boys were rated more negative in all predictions. The subjects' background variables of marital status, social attitudes, age and religion were not related to their ratings. Both of these studies may have influenced negative reactions by the raters because of data collection procedures, but the issue of how to work with expectations in preservice teachers warrants thought.

This review of research concerning children of divorced parents and their teachers suggests that these children sometimes are disadvantaged and sometimes not by the changes which occur. Whatever happens in the long term they need consideration for an adjustment period. Because increasingly children are in school at all ages, educators will find these data useful to their understanding children whose families are divorced.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TEACHERS OF YOUNG CHILDREN

The research which was reviewed has implications for teachers and care givers as they work with infants, toddlers and preschoolers in early education and child care, especially in child care centers where mothers have major responsibility for the care given to their children. These data seem applicable to families from a wide variety of economic and cultural groups.

These implications are: (1) Because when divorce is accompanied by absence of the father it affects cognitive and social development, the teacher may find these children have different needs and behaviors than she has known before. (2) These differences suggest that she should modify her interactions with the children and seek rationale for prescriptive curriculum. (3) It stresses that the teacher should understand normal behavior and irregularities in development in order to help a child attain appropriate developmental milestones. (4) It alerts the teacher to consider her own behavior when she responds to aversive or withdrawn children and to do so with maturity and trust. (5) It reassures her as she considers the effects of time on behavior in perspective. (6) It suggests that he/she make modifications in the curriculum and be innovative in program development.

Considerations of Development

Due to family disruptions a young child who is in midst of his most rapid period of growth may regress in the gains he has attained, he may be slow in achieving normal levels or he may show maladjustive behaviors. Therefore, he may appear inadequate in growth and achievement, or appear personally troubled. These behaviors provide anxious moments for his family, influence his own feelings of worth and self-identity and cause teachers and other caregivers erroneously to judge his worth. These behaviors may be only a temporary delay because of a specific event or

have more lasting effects. Clinicians in particular, note that the schools may be in a good position to recognize these changes occurring as a result of divorce and family separation.

How may the school respond to these children? The following will focus upon ways which may help the teacher understand the child and suggest individualized educational experiences. The focus will be on the teacher, always considered the most important variable in the child's school experience. The school earlier served as intervention for children suffering from a variety of adverse conditions; for example, for handicapped preschoolers and poverty children. It also can serve as a support and change agent for children experiencing family change.

Teachers are taught to recognize and facilitate the events of normal maturation; such insights gain importance when disruptions to normal development occur. When this happens teachers may be a personal support and guide to the child through these periods of change.

McDermott (1968) was one of the first to recognize that the teacher may ease the trauma to a child by preparing him for changes which may occur. He suggested facilitating natural maturation otherwise disrupted by marital separation through guided play.

Behaviors indicating escape from reality, depression and grief, regression in speech, cleanliness training and increased separation anxiety are ways children deal with stress. Oppositional behaviors and excessive negative overtures to adults and other children may be clues for a teacher to consider a child's actions as well as her own response to them.

The research data relating the time of parent separation to changed behaviors in the child has implications for teachers. If, as indicated,

children typically respond negatively to divorce for only a prescribed period of time, this understanding enables teachers to take a more positive view considering the long term outcomes. It enables teachers to be positive and supportive and optimistic as they look forward to later adjustments.

The increase in negative behaviors usually found near the time of the parent's separation suggests that teachers may best deal with negatives as coping devices and symptoms rather than as established behaviors. Teachers should avoid responding to increased aversive behaviors, especially of boys, with punitive and negative actions. This means careful, mature understanding of self as well as of behavior of the child.

If divorce is followed by the absence of the father the development of sex identity may be hampered for boys. The need for males as teachers of young children has been a favored topic as well as of controversy for a long time; it has been supported with clinical rather than research evidence. It seems rational that with boys who live in single-parent families with mothers as the main caregiver and experience divorce there would be positives in the child having a model which men teachers can provide.

Increased family disorganization during this period should be considered as a reflection of temporary adjustment. The preschool teacher often has served as a support, counselor and friend to parents of the children they teach; the opportunity to be supportive to the single parent mother is a natural outcome. The teacher may help a parent communicate with her child around issues of divorce, may help her see ways her own behavior troubles her child and may share with another woman the joys as well as pain of caring for a child who is experiencing

stress. Along with relatives and friends the teacher may serve as a support to the single parent who is caregiver of his child.

Increasingly infants and toddlers are participants in group care and education, and teachers will find it useful to understand the importance of the mother/father/child triad as an interactive social system. They should be alert to the positives which accompany nurturance from both parents and the association with later cognitive competence. Unless there is severe pathology in one parent or the relationship between parents the teacher should recognize the benefits to a child when he is able to continue associations with both parents. She may not be able to change the makeup of the family, but she should be informed of the implications when it is other than intact.

Children who experience absence of the father under five years of age particularly may be vulnerable to stress in the elementary years where successful academic achievement is necessary to self esteem and status in the group. The effects of parent separation on basic readiness skills for four and five year olds has not been considered in the research literature, but it warrants consideration.

The Teacher and the Curriculum

The suggestion that presence of a father in the home is necessary for accurate sex role and heterosexual adjustment has implications for the program and curriculum. Books and toys used in dramatic play may help children clarify roles in the family and the world and examine identity relationships as well as practice positive social behaviors. The child without a father may find that experience with the families of other children or with male teachers or volunteers has a positive learning as well as give satisfying personal contacts. The male or female teacher may have a powerful influence on children as they demonstrate

diversity in handling relationships and interact with other adults and children. The teacher may be of special help to the single parent. Through their own behaviors they may demonstrate strengths and give support in personal interactions, show humane understanding of personal behaviors and behavior in ways which are appropriate to the setting and time.

Information about family status should be shared openly and honestly with a child and it should be demonstrated that he is not less esteemed because of his unusual family makeup. The child should be realistic about his own behaviors, and reassured of his worth when they are less than positive. For the very young child this seldom can be achieved with verbal explanation; rather, information should be easily understood and may even be less than fully complete if that seems appropriate for the child. The teacher should model mature and responsible behavior as she shares information with a child. She should take advantage of being more mature and less biased than the child himself. Such experiences with a secure adult may be a maturing experience for the child and also may be for the teacher herself. Together, they both may develop new strengths as they work through these common experiences surrounding family issues.

Most professionals suggest that children benefit from talking about divorce related events. The teacher is in an excellent position to help a child clarify the accuracy of his perceptions as well as judge the significance of such events. Even though the primary intervention for preschoolers takes place through their parents, teachers are in an excellent position to help in this role. Kelly and Wallerstein (1977) suggest that parents should discuss divorce related events with their children, relieve hostile

behaviors through intervention methods, and change their own behaviors when they are causing distress to their children. Most parents will need help in finding techniques enabling them to do all three things. As an impartial observer and trained professional, the teacher may relieve child suffering by helping the parent with behaviors which relieve such situations.

Play

One way to understand children's behavior in response to an immediate crisis and use these understandings to help him is through observing their play, and they act out in play behaviors about which they cannot speak. Older children can express feelings verbally; very young children are less able to do this. The limited number of studies which observe the play of children experiencing family changes suggest that observing and interpreting play holds promise for understanding these children.

Earlier described studies which observed the play of preschool children reacting to divorce show that these children differ from children from intact homes in their play (McDermott, 1968; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1975). They show marked rigidity in imaginative play, less frequently use objects as props for play and rarely are able to fantasize imaginary objects as people. They showed an impairment of ability to master anxiety and depression through acting out experiences in their play. They show less reversability in play and demonstrate less ability to show a caring role for others (Hetherington, Cox & Cox 1979). And, they regressed in all areas of their development but most of all in the ability to play imaginatively. These findings suggest that teachers may use play as a way to understand a child and also as a way to help him. Another important finding is that during the first year following parent separation the child's play patterns are fragmented and cognitively and socially less mature. This finding supports other data pointing out the influence of this period

of time on a child's adjustment.

Play which has been used as a tool for social relearning in clinics may also be used for this purpose in schools. Eli Bower (1974) cites the value of games as both a socially enhancing experience and a merger of affective/cognitive learning. He suggests that play, particularly group games provide a vehicle for helping children rationally explore feelings, manage emotions and tie the symbolic process (emotion) to the secondary process (cognition) to enhance each other. The use of play materials such as toys, books and dolls are helpful materials for the teacher to understand child behaviors and encourage expression in times of stress. Teachers have considered play useful for promoting incidental learning and understanding its concepts. It is a means of understanding a child's development and interpreting his personal needs, strengths and misunderstandings. It may allow a teacher to view a child's perception of the current family situation and help correct his misunderstandings of a situation. At preschool level a method involves peer group counseling sessions aimed at promoting a reality perspective. Sessions using drawing, role play, books and puppets help children understand and accept the changes accompanying divorce (Note 1).

Teacher Expectations

That teachers may have negative expectations of children's behavior because of their own experience with divorce and/or personal attitudes is still open to question, but it has important considerations for teacher behavior and for those who educate them.

Stereotyped expectations suggesting negative behaviors and achievement in children of divorced families has implications for teachers as they interact with children and implies a limit to her own development as well. When the teacher accepts the negative stereotypes she withholds growth for

the child and limits her own development as well. She develops personally as the children succeed and grow; her negative expectations affect the interpersonal contacts with children and limit the positives in the learning environment. Sadly, such stereotyping probably accompanies other negative personal qualities such as rigidity of thought, conservative behaviors and less than creative behaviors.

Stereotyped expectations of teachers for children experiencing family divorce are suggested, are not confirmed at this time; but the seriousness of the implication warrants observation and caution both to those interpreting the data and those who apply it.

Undoubtedly, there are teachers who apply such stereotypes. They may be among those with extremes in both the amount and kind of training; those who see pathology in every child because of a training focus on the troubled child and those who are unfamiliar with understandings about the effects of divorce on children and those uninformed about early education. Teachers of young children typically are better informed about child development and more often think of children and behavior in individual terms; this suggests that they are less apt than teachers of older children to apply negative stereotypes. This last statement relies on other than research evidence.

The studies of teacher expectation all have problems with the instruments used for data collection. They appear to bias the subjects toward giving negative stereotypes to children. These data should be considered with care and efforts to improve the procedures as well as continue studying the area is suggested.

SUMMARY

Questions which have prompted research on the effects of divorce on young children suggest that two considerations of time are important: One, to consider the time space surrounding the point of separation of the parents and, second, the significance of the age and development of the child when divorce occurs. A period of approximately eighteen months surrounding the parents' separation is a critical time for adjustment of the child both at home and school. Depending upon the child and family relationships he/she will return to behaviors typical of an earlier period after this period. A second finding which relates to the chronological age of the child and his personal development when divorce occurs and the father leaves the home strongly suggests that children below six years are affected. When the father leaves the family during this early period, infants and toddlers experience changes in caregiving which may be less than optimal for their development.

These understandings enable teachers to be positive and optimistic knowing that changes during this period may be temporary with the prospect that with good supports the majority of children will return to an earlier adjustment. At the same time it cautions him/her to consider her own behavior as well as the development of the child. The teacher, male or female may serve as a model of behavior and identity for the child and a support person to the parent, helping him/her better communicate with his/her child. It is a time when he/she may affect the situation through appropriate curriculum interventions and sensitive personal interactions with the child.

The importance of the family as a social system and the negatives when this father/mother/child trio is disrupted suggests that presence of the father is especially important for the positive development of

infants and toddlers. Less than optimum effects are in both cognitive development and socialization. For preschoolers personal, social changes relating to later heterosexual adjustment are noted in girls and irregularities in sex role development in boys. Negatives to development which result in unusual patterns of growth and maturation may cause younger children to be less successful than they otherwise may be in first experiences in reading and mathematics learning. Understanding that both parents are important for positive social learning suggests curriculum experiences which use materials to clarify family roles and examine family relationships.

Expressive play may be a way to understand children's feelings and behavior during a stressful period and should be encouraged and guided. Facilitating play may be a way to understand a child during a period of change and developed as a tool for social relearning. Whether teachers bring negative attitudes and expectations toward children who are from divorced families should be clarified through continued study.

The material discussed in this paper points to short term as well as future effects upon the personal, social and cognitive growth of young children who experience divorce in their families suggesting that these children bring different behaviors and needs to preschools and child care centers than children of an earlier period when divorce was not as common. Teachers and caregivers of these children will find these understandings are useful for them as they work with children in schools.

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